

Israeli Tourists Get Welcome in Jordan
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From Associated Press - Aqaba, Jordan
In high spirits and with tight security, the first busload of Israeli tourists crossed into Jordan on Sunday, hoping to make friends in a land until recently considered an enemy.
Welcome to Jordan. Now we have peace and can visit each other like good neighbors. It's a great moment, said Abdullah Jaber, a Jordanian tour guide who hopped on the bus at the border.
The 35 pioneer Israeli tourists broke into hearty applause.
It's like a dream come true, said Yoram Eden, an accounting professor from Herzliya.
Historic significance overtook bureaucratic procedures at the Jordanian border terminal.
Colleagues gathered to watch a Jordanian police officer stamp the Israeli passports. "It's the first time, you know," the officer said with a big smile.
A currency clerk, asked if he could change Israeli shekels for Jordanian dinars, answered, "Not yet, but soon."
The travelers were the first to enter Jordan with Israeli passports since the two neighbors signed a peace treaty Oct. 26.
Israeli passports, even Israeli visa stamps in foreign passports, were banned in the past. After a nonbelligerency treaty was signed in July, Jordan opened its borders only to Israelis carrying foreign passports.
I came to see the first Israelis. I want to tell them that we are very excited about peace, said Mohammed Kalifa, a mechanical engineer in his 50s who came all the way from Amman, 175 miles to the northeast.
It's a pleasure, border police commander Lt. Col. Abdul Rahman said as he shook hands with the arriving Israelis.
The focus of the two-day tour is the ancient city of Petra, the rose-red capital of the Nabateans that dates back more than 2,000 years.
For many Israelis, Petra symbolized the Jewish state's isolation from the rest of the region. Dozens of Israeli youths tried to sneak across the desert border to Petra as a test of courage. A Hebrew song, "The Red Rock," glorified one officer's secret journey and was banned from state radio.
Despite the friendliness, a three-car police escort pulled behind the bus as it headed for Petra, and at least three soldiers or police officers were positioned at every intersection along the route.
The Israeli tourists were warned not to speak Hebrew in loud voices or wear T-shirts with Hebrew slogans while in Jordan, where Islamic militants strongly oppose the peace agreement with Israel.
Yet many in the group broke out singing "The Red Rock" as the bus pulled into Petra on Sunday evening, after a several-hour journey that included a feast over lamb at a Bedouin encampment.
Tour leader Moshe Hananel said he brought only 35 people for the first trip, which returns today. He plans to bring 250 on Thursday.
We expect much of the Jordanians. I certainly hope they don't disappoint us, said Yitzhak Chesler, a tour guide from Herzliya, as he waited for his passport to be processed.
They have so much to gain in economy from the peace that I expect openness, and I hope I'll find friendship.